



from, Building the Canine Athlete by Chris Zink

When exercising, handlers must always follow the rules for the area they are exercising in. Leash laws must be obeyed, and children's play areas should be avoided.

EXERCISES FOR STRENGTH:

Digging builds strength in shoulders and upper back as well as rear-stabilizing muscles.

High 5s/wave builds strength in shoulders and upper back. Exercise should be done using both front legs equally.

Lateral leg lifts require the dog to lift his left front/right hind or right front/left hind legs and builds strength along the back, neck, and sides. The dog must maintain his balance while holding his body up on 2 legs. Work up to 1 minute for each diagonal pair to build muscles.

The **abdominal cookie reach** exercise works abdominal and side muscles. Have the dog lie on his side and lure his head and nose up with a treat over the dog's shoulder to perform a side curl. Don't allow the dog to cheat by propping himself up on his elbows.

Using a **rocker/wobble board**, have the dog step on with only his front or his rear legs to work stabilizer muscles. Putting all 4 legs on the board works trunk and stabilizer muscles.

A simple **roll over** exercise works core muscles.

A **sit to stand** exercise works the rear leg muscles. Have the dog work on a hill facing in all directions of the incline to increase intensity. The steeper the hill the greater the work out. Be sure the dog is rising by pushing with his rear legs and not pulling forward with his front legs.

Sitting up, as if begging works core muscles and the exercise is intensified when additional movement is added. Have the dog do 'high 5s' or nose target to different head positions (side to side, up and down). The extra movement challenges the dog's balance and requires more core strength.

A **Sit-up to "dance" to sit-up position** exercise works the rear legs and core muscle. To start, the dog sits and then raises both front legs to a begging position. Next, without putting the front feet on the floor the dog moves into a stand on his rear legs. Moving back to the begging position completes one repetition of the exercise. This is NOT a suitable exercise for dogs with slipping patellas.

Walking backwards works abdominal and rear leg muscles. The exercise can be made harder by using a hill.

Retrieving a ball or other toy while moving up an incline builds rear leg muscles.

Performing a **stand-down-stand** builds rear leg muscles. The exercise can be made more difficult by working on a hill. Work with the incline in all directions.



Playing tug works the rear end of the body if the dog's head is raised. If the dog's head is lowered, the tugging works the front half of the body. The handler should not do fast or sharp pulls up and down or to the side to avoid neck injuries. It's okay though if the DOG chooses to move his head that way.

A **crawl** is good for working core muscles. Start by having the dog crawl under something and gradually fade out using the object as the dog understands the cue.

PROPRIOCEPTION (BODY AWARENESS) EXERCISES:

Stepping over poles no higher than hock height that are on the ground, raised, evenly or unevenly spaced is good exercise for the dog.

Stepping through a ladder works similarly as exercise for the dog. Any ladder lying on the ground will work. It's also easy to make a ladder just for this purpose using pieces of PVC pipe a few connectors.

Stepping through random pattern poles on the ground, like pick-up-sticks is another good proprioception exercise. Simply scatter a bunch of jump poles on the ground and have the dog walk through them. Adding cushions, foam pads or inflatable disks in between some of the sticks will add additional difficulty.

Asking the dog to **spin** can be made more challenging by having the dog perform the exercise on a hill, in snow, in water, on sand, etc. Make sure the dog is turning in a small circle using all limbs, and not flinging himself around to avoid using a limb.

Rear foot targeting can be made more challenging by increasing the height of the object he is 'finding' with his back feet. Changing surfaces, like moving from pavement to grass, increases the challenge too.

Learning to **pivot** is good exercise for a dog. Typically, the exercise is done with the dog's front or rear feet on an object. The challenge can be increased if the dog is asked to move his front feet independently of his rear feet without using an object for the dog to stand on. This can also be reversed so that the dog is moving his rear feet as his front feet remain in place. Difficulty can be added by adding a couple of PVC poles for the dog to step over or a couple of foam pads for him to step on. Make sure your dog pivots in both directions.

Lifting each leg on cue is a great exercise for dogs. Teach the dog to 'high 5' each front foot and 'hike' each rear leg (as if about to pee).

STRETCHING EXERCISES:

Have the dog 'warm up' by walking around just a bit before beginning. Stretches can be held for 10 seconds unless the dog begins to fight it. Stretches should be completed 3-5 times each. Active stretches are preferred at the beginning of a session. Passive stretches should be added at the completion of training.



To perform a **neck and back stretch**, use one hand to keep the dog in a stand position and the other to move a target or treat to get the dog to move his nose to each shoulder, each hip, each rear foot and down between the front legs. Then have the dog stand with his front feet on something that is about his shoulder height and have him stretch his nose up as vertically as possible. This provides a good stretch for the dog's entire back.

Moving the dog into a **play bow** provides a good stretch. Make sure that the dog is sustaining the bow for a few seconds rather than just bouncing back up.

Get the dog to '**stand tall**' by having the dog stand in front of you facing in the same direction. Lift the dog's front legs and put his back against your body. Gently lift the front legs up vertically.

Stretch the dog by using **passive range of motion**. With the dog lying on his side move all leg joints in natural movement directions to the point of a gentle stretch. This can also be done with the dog standing if preferred. Keep the dog parallel with the floor if lying down or in line with the body if standing. Never torque the legs at odd angles.

EXERCISES FOR ENDURANCE:

When working to build endurance be sure to cross train so the dog works as many muscle groups as possible. If the exercise is performed on leash, the dog must demonstrate good leash manners. The dog does not have to heel but may not pull or drag the handler.

Trotting on leash is good for building endurance. Trotting works most muscle groups, but since dogs rarely trot at the same pace for long make sure to vary the speed to reduce muscle fatigue. Have the dog trot on flat land, on hills, in sand or snow, in shallow water, etc. to vary the intensity.

The same rules apply when having the dog **trot next to a scooter, bike, or person on roller blades**. Proper safety equipment must be used for these activities including a 'springer' if biking.

Using a **treadmill** is a great way to build endurance. Be sure to use a treadmill that is properly sized for your dog, at least long enough for the dog's full stride plus some room to fade forward and backward on the belt. Start this type of conditioning slowly.

Pulling a skier, wagon or sled adds resistance to further build endurance. Proper equipment is required when doing this type of activity including a properly fitted, v-front, non-restrictive harness which takes the force of the pulling. Other equipment depends on the activity. Make sure that the dog is pulling in line with the weight and not out to the side to avoid injury.

Long distance swimming is a great way to build endurance for water loving dogs. This type of swimming requires the dog to wear a life jacket in case he tires or gets tangled. The easiest way to accomplish long distance swimming is to travel beside your dog in a kayak, canoe, or small boat. Reduce fatigue by taking breaks and allowing the dog to walk, run or just stand on dry land for short periods of time.